

Bulletin

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<https://tasfieldnats.org.au>

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we study natural history.

Excursion to Risdon Brook Dam and Mt Direction

Saturday 5th August 2023

We all met at the Risdon Brook Dam car park at 10:00am on a relatively sunny Saturday morning and proceeded to get a group photo before starting the walk.



Field Nats at Risdon Brook Dam
Photo: Eddie Gall

Although the group was small, we were all very eager, and we slowly walked around the west side of the dam, passing by dry sclerophyll forest on our left, whilst also getting a wonderful view onto the dam, on our right. Not even 10 minutes into the walk Otto found an interesting weevil; *Poropterius melancholicus*, a log-

dwelling species that would be spotted three more times along the walk.

The group then turned onto a small path that eventually led onto the Mt Direction Track. Most of the group continued along here, although the usual suspects - Kevin, Bruno and Otto - stayed behind after Bruno found a juvenile *Ammoniropa vigens* (ammonite snail) among a rock scree. This juvenile represented the first live record outside of Hobart of this extremely narrow-range species, and they were understandably ecstatic to find it.



Brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*)
Photo: Eddie Gall

Some members continued along the four-wheel drive track along Saggy Flats to the saddle between Mt Direction and Madmans Hill. We took in the views towards the Derwent River, Gagebrook and Bridgewater and listened to the distant sounds of

sports vehicles at Baskerville Raceway. During the lunch stop, we looked for insects and spiders under fallen logs. An unusual find was *Teucrium corymbosum* (forest germander) and we wondered whether it might have been a weed. It is part of the Lamiaceae family which includes mint, marjoram, thyme, and rosemary. Despite its culinary relatives, it had an unpleasant smell. Later we found out that it is listed as being a rare native with the Mt Direction area being a hot spot.

Most of the group convened back at the carpark around 2:30pm.

Otto Bell

Excursion to Greenhill Observatory, Bisdee Tier

Saturday 9th October 2023



Field Nats at Greenhill Observatory
Photo: Eddie Gall

The turnoff sign to “Bisdee Tier” is on the Midlands Highway partway between Melton Mowbray and Otlands. The University of Tasmania’s Greenhill Observatory, one of five astronomical observatories that UTAS operates, is located at 646 m above sea level at the top of the tier. Few of us would have had the opportunity to visit this research facility, but on Saturday, 9th September, thanks to the efforts of TFNC member Kristi Ellingsen and her husband Professor Simon Ellingsen (a UTAS physicist), 27 field naturalists were able to experience this facility and learn something about its history and the research that is being carried out there. Simon, who is Dean of the

School of Natural Sciences at UTAS, presented us with a brief history of the Greenhill Observatory as well as answering questions from interested members of the club. It was named after pioneer astronomer and longtime UTAS academic Dr. John Greenhill and is situated in remote sheep-grazing country where ‘light pollution’ is minimal or non-existent, replacing the outdated facility at Mt. Canopus where light from the Greater Hobart Metropolitan area made it no longer viable as an optical research station. The original centrepiece of the Greenhill Observatory, the 1.27 m optical telescope, was donated to UTAS by Canadian entrepreneur philanthropist Caisey Harlinton in 1912 and it has been operating ever since. Many other individuals and businesses made generous monetary donations, with the University of Tasmania providing an additional \$2 million. The Greenhill Observatory has been involved in a wide range of projects, for example, contributing to studies of the atmosphere of the dwarf planet Pluto and the discovery of planets around other stars. It is not exclusively an optical facility, as it also houses a 7.3 m radio telescope with which it, *inter alia*, can track objects in low-earth orbit, such as the ‘space junk’ and debris associated with the ca. 2000 satellites that now orbit our planet at any one time. As the number of satellites continues to grow, with more and more countries entering the ‘space race’, so will the importance of the tracking facilities at the Greenhill Observatory.



Dish in action in satellite tracking mode
Photo: Geoff Carle



Westwood's Green Centipede (*Cormocephalus westwoodi*)
Photo: Mick Brown

The observatory is surrounded by grassy woodland dominated by *Eucalyptus pauciflora* and *E. dalrympleana/viminalis*. The surrounds also contained *E. delegatensis* which had been selectively logged, and *E. globulus* at lower altitudes.



Grassy woodland surrounding observatory
Photo: Mick Brown

Outside of the sheltered inner confines of the observatory, it was a cold and blustery day, with a 'feels-like' -0.8 degree C which hampered natural history observations. Aside from hearing the occasional call of a Yellow-throated Honeyeater or a Forest Raven and a sighting of a Wedge-tailed Eagle, there was little to report. Kevin found five land snails, none of which were of particular interest. There was a noteworthy weevil, *Decilaus infaustus*, of interest in that the location was far inland from the usual coastal regions from which the species is usually found. The habitat at Bisdee Tier is probably best described as dry

sclerophyll, degraded from its current land use as a sheep grazing property.



Eucalyptus dalrympleana forest
Photo: Eddie Gall

Those of us who attended the excursion went away with a greater understanding of the role of astronomical observatories such as Greenhill and the data they provide us with. Humankind has succeeded in damaging and polluting the land mass we live on, oceans are becoming covered with islands of detritus, and plastic and microplastic waste is filling our shorelines. Now we have learned that waste products are intruding into nearby space. If there ever is a will to halt or mitigate this trend, tracking stations such as the one at Bisdee Tier will have a vital role to play. We thank Kristi and Simon and the University of Tasmania for providing us with the opportunity to see this facility.

David Ratkowsky

Two Bisdee Tier Mosses

Growing in a sheltered hollow in a dolerite outcrop inside the radio telescope enclosure we found an interesting moss. With our eyes watering due to the freezing wind, we quickly photographed it and retreated inside!



Breutelia affinis (left) *Polytrichum juniperinum* (right)
Photo: Anna McEldowney

We originally thought it may have been *Polytrichum juniperinum* as it had male gametophytes with antheridia, but when we noticed that its leaves weren't incurved on the margins and that it was a much softer moss than *Polytrichum*, we began to think it may be a *Breutelia*. Fortunately, Eddie had collected a small specimen and when the leaves were dissected out for comparison purposes beside a known sample of *Polytrichum* the difference between these two mosses was obvious. David Ratkowsky agreed with the determination of *Breutelia affinis* as did Greg Jordan at the School of Biological Sciences at UTAS. Its main feature compared to other *Breutelia* species is apparently the lack of a dense mat of reddish rhizoids on the lower parts of the stem. *P. juniperinum* was also present on the top of Bisdee Tier, but no male gametophytes were seen at this site.



Breutelia affinis male gametophytes
Photo: Annabel Carle

We include for comparison photographs of the male gametophytes with antheridia of *P. juniperinum* and *B. affinis* and the dissected male gametophyte shoots of both.

Anna McEldowney and Annabel Carle



Polytrichum juniperinum male gametophytes
Photo: Anna McEldowney

Excursion to Chauncy Vale (with Launceston Field Naturalists Club)

Saturday 7th October 2023

For our October excursion, TNFC joined forces with LFNC for a trip to Chauncy Vale Wildlife Sanctuary and Flat Rock Reserve near Bagdad. The former area was the home of renowned children's author, Nan Chauncy, preserved by the family as a nature reserve, while the latter is a Tasmanian Land Conservancy property. Together with the Alpha Pinnacle Conservation Areas, they form the largest continuous protected area in the Southern Midlands with a mixture of peppermint

woodlands, blue gum forest and rock plate grasslands (www.chauncyvale.com).

Eddie Gall showed the leadership that we have come to expect - no matter that he hadn't arrived into Hobart from WA until after midnight, he appeared bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at 10am on Saturday morning to greet us all! After a little bit of confusion about where we were all meeting, our joint group was assembled at the sanctuary meeting rooms and introductions were made, including Steven Forsyth, interpretation officer for the site, and visiting Bulgarian entomologists Lyubomir and Vlada Penev.



Field Nats at Chauncy Vale
Photo: Amanda Thomson

The morning was definitely chilly, so everyone was eager to start on the walk with a general consensus to head towards Flat Rock and see how far everyone got. Starting alongside the creek, the track heads gently but steadily uphill through lovely open dry sclerophyll woodland. As per usual, various groups stopped to investigate under logs or stones, while others counted the petals and stamens on flowers, raised their binoculars, sieved leaf litter or beat the vegetation.



Chauncy Vale dry sclerophyll
Photo: Keith Martin-Smith

Field naturalising progressed along the route accompanied by much bird song – altogether 23 species were heard, seen and/or photographed, including Scarlet & Flame robins, Grey & Black Currawongs, various honeyeaters, thornbills, parrots and cuckoos.



Shining bronze-cuckoo
Photo: Keith Martin-Smith

The weather became warmer and sunnier as the day progressed with more invertebrates starting to move about and enjoy the spring flowers - along with the botanists. At least 29 species of plants were identified but fungi were somewhat lacking, perhaps due to the dry nature of the forest. However, invertebrates were abundant with 73 species recorded on iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/tas-field-nats-2023-oct-chauncy-vale?tab=observations>), including some beautiful dragon springtails (*Acanthanura* sp.).

After most people had returned from Flat Rock in the afternoon, Steven Forsyth gave an interesting talk on the geology of the area, particularly the history of the sandstones. Many people stayed for an evening BBQ, sharing tasty treats. Lyubomir and Vlada Penev who had joined us for the day shared their delightful Bulgarian red wine.



Close-up of head of dragon springtail *Acanthanura* sp.
Photo: Bruno Bell

After the barbeque, Simon Grove told us about *Clethentia aberrans*, the ‘aberrant bald-headed fly’. This species had once been found in many places in Southern Tasmania but the last time it was found, many years ago, was in the Chauncy Vale meeting room. In keeping with the eclectic nature of the day, Lyubomir gave a talk about the TDWG¹ conference he was attending and Bulgarian history, including how royalty in Bulgaria had become interested in nature and had resulted in the early establishment of extensive nature parks preserving native plants and wildlife.

¹ TDWG = Biodiversity Information Standards formerly Taxonomic Databases Working Group

Keith Martin-Smith

Recent talks at General Meetings

Thursday 7th September - Dr Lisa-ann Gershwin presented *Things that Glow in the Dark in Tasmania*. Lisa-ann, among other things, is a renowned expert, having described over 200 species and written two books about jellyfish.

Thursday 5th October - Tessa Smith presented *The Little Life in the Leaf Litter: A Look at Leaf-Litter Beetles in Tasmania* covering Tessa’s PhD research on the collection techniques and biogeography of leaf-litter inhabiting beetles in Tasmanian wet forests and rainforests.

Upcoming talks at General Meetings

2nd November 2023 - James Wood presented *Now you see me – Adventures with Tasmanian Cudweeds*. James is the Seed Bank Coordinator of the Tasmanian Seed Conservation Centre at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens.

7th December 2023 - Members’ Night

A TFNC tradition is to have a number of short presentations for the last meeting of the year. In the last few years, this has often been by committee members. It would be great to have some new blood! If you have something that you would like to share, please contact the president (eddiegall@bigpond.com)

The book sale will continue after the General Meeting. To see what is available in November and December please check our library page <https://www.tasfieldnats.org.au/library/>

Planned excursions

Saturday 9th or Sunday 10th December - Christmas BBQ at Tinderbox. The choice of day will be weather dependent.

Easter Excursion:

For next year’s Easter excursion, the club has booked the Mt Cameron Field Study Centre in Tasmania’s far North-east. For more information see: https://scottsdalehs.schoolzineplus.com/file/media/330/fsc_brochure.pdf .

The study centre is about four and a half hour’s drive from Hobart (one and a half hour’s drive east of Scottsdale). It is a biologically, scenically, and historically interesting area, featuring small granite mountains and has easy driving access to coastal reserves. More details and bookings will be available early in the New Year.

TFNC Website

Our current website providers will be withdrawing the platform we use in March 2024. By then we’ll need to have developed a new website to replace it. The

committee is currently looking at options for a new one.

Observation Book

Traditionally, we have a book available at meetings for members to record their observations which are transcribed into our electronic archive. In recent years there has been little use made of the observations and to a large extent, the book's role has been replaced by electronic media such as iNaturalist, Flickr and Facebook. So, the committee has decided to discontinue the observation book. If you have observations you would like to share with members, please send them to the Quarterly Bulletin editor tfn.bulletin.editor@gmail.com and they will be included (photographs are especially welcome). You will also always have the chance to tell us at our general meetings!

Wearing of masks at meetings

In line with current practice, the committee has decided that from the November General Meeting wearing of masks will become optional. If you want to wear a mask, please bring your own. If you are unwell, or have flu-like symptoms, please stay at home. We will continue to follow the Tasmanian Government's latest safety guidelines for Coronavirus.

Seasons in the South – a Tasmanian naturalist's journey of discovery – and recovery

Long-time member and frequent contributor of articles to *The Tasmanian Naturalist*, Simon Grove, has released his latest book. It is beautifully written, great reading and superbly illustrated by Keith Davis. You can find out more and order copies from <https://www.southernseasons.com.au/>

The Swift Parrot is the Winner! Threatened species triumph in the 2023 Bird of the year poll!

Was it our esteemed Vice President Kristi - by encouraging members at the October General Meeting to vote NOW on the very last day and indeed during the very last hours of voting – who helped get the Swift Parrot over the line? It was the first-time Swifties have taken out the title. All the latest about 'the nail biting finish' can be found here:

<https://birdlife.org.au/news/your-2023-bird-of-the-year/#:~:text=Your%202023%20Bird%20of%20the%20Year%2C%20the%20Swift%20Parrot,Photo%20by%20Jasmine%20Boehm>.

Runner up for the third year in a row was the Tawny Frogmouth!



Swift Parrot showing its championship form
Photo: Mick Brown

